

National Defence—Committee

committee I trust every opportunity will be given for a thorough examination of all branches in connection with service pensions.

Motion agreed to and bill read the second time.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO
CONSIDER BILL NO. 133

Hon. Brooke Claxton (Minister of National Defence) moved:

That a special committee be appointed to consider Bill No. 133, an act respecting national defence; with power to send for persons, papers and records and to report from time to time; and that the said committee consist of Messrs. Adamson, Balcer, Bennett, Blackmore, Blanchette, Campney, Cavers, Claxton, Dickey, George, Gillis, Harkness, Henderson, Higgins, Langlois (Gaspé), Lapointe, Larson, McLean (Huron-Perth), Pearkes, Roberge, Stick, Thomson, Viau, Welbourn and Wright; and that standing order 65 (1) be suspended in relation thereto.

Mr. G. R. Pearkes (Nanaimo): Mr. Speaker, on the 14th day of March I moved that a special committee be set up to deal with the question of national defence. In support of my motion I gave two examples of the type of investigation that such a committee could deal with. One was to examine the national defence bill which the minister has suggested this evening should be referred to the special committee. The other was to examine the question of the estimates. The house decided not to accept my motion and it was defeated. A few days later the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Macdonnell) was speaking on the defence estimates and he was called to order because he again suggested that the estimates be referred to a special committee. He was told that he was out of order because the house had decided on the matter of the broader principle of the committee examining not only the estimates but the bills in question, and the ruling of the Speaker was upheld by a vote.

Therefore I am very doubtful whether the motion can be considered to be in order because what is sauce for the goose should also be sauce for the gander. Nevertheless perhaps half a committee is better than no committee at all, and I am not going to ask you, Mr. Speaker, to give a ruling on the point I have raised. I only repeat what I said earlier today, that I hope the committee will be given the widest possible scope to examine into all the ramifications of the various bills. The minister has already given assurance that that can be done. There are cases, as he mentioned when discussing Bill No. 133, where the financial aspects of the bill are brought out in various sections thereof. It will therefore be necessary to examine the effect of some of the financial recommendations which are being made.

[Mr. Pearkes.]

For instance, we are to consider the effect of unification of the various services. It is to be hoped that unification will bring about a lessening of the amount of money which might be required for each of the services if they were to continue to operate separately. Emphasis has also been placed on giving a strictly Canadian appearance to our forces. To attempt to Canadianize the navy particularly will undoubtedly require an additional expenditure of money. That is quite obvious. Therefore the committee should be given the opportunity to inquire into the financial effect of the various sections in the different bills. Provided assurances can be given that there is full scope for the committee to inquire into any branch of the services which may be affected by any of the bills, I do not wish to press what may be considered to be a point of order as to whether or not the motion is in order.

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, before the motion is put I want to remove any suggestion that may have been conveyed by the minister's remarks on the bill itself that the subject has been comprehensively covered at this point. I believe in a great many cases it was thought by hon. members, including myself, that detailed discussion could best take place when the bill was before the committee and then brought back to the house for further consideration.

There is one point I should like to raise, however, before the minister speaks on this motion to set up a committee. Certainly I am not suggesting for a moment that the minister must assume responsibility for interpretation placed by the press upon his words or actions, unless he himself has been responsible for those interpretations; but I believe hon. members will have read statements in the press during the past few days that it is the intention of the minister to widen the scope of this inquiry beyond what was originally contemplated and, at least to some extent, comply with the requests which have been made that a general discussion be permitted of the organization of the Department of National Defence and its affairs generally. If there is nothing in those statements the minister can remove any doubt about it. If on the other hand it is intended to widen the scope of the inquiry before this committee I think it would be well for the minister to clarify that point now and indicate to what extent that is so. I remind the house that the bill is being sent to a committee on the motion of the minister himself, and I suggest that this invalidates the argument he has made from time to time that it would not be a desirable thing to refer the whole organization of the Department of National